



Gender Equality in English Language Textbook

Afia Mahmood¹, Farzana Yousaf², Ahsan Bashir³, Sabahat Parveen⁴

¹ Lecturer, Department of English, University of Education, Bank Road Campus, Lahore, Pakistan.

Email: afiamahmood@ue.edu.pk

² Assistant Professor, Department of Education, University of Education, Bank Road Campus, Lahore, Pakistan.

Email: farzana.yousaf@ue.edu.pk

³ Assistant Professor, Department of English, University of Education, Lower Mall Campus, Lahore, Pakistan.

Email: ahsan.bashir@ue.edu.pk

⁴ Assistant Professor, Department of English, University of Education, Faisalabad Campus, Lahore, Pakistan.

Email: sabahat.parveen@ue.edu.pk

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Article History:

Received: April 07, 2022

Revised: May 10, 2022

Accepted: May 10, 2022

Available Online: May 15, 2022

Keywords:

English Language Textbook

Content Analysis

SDG 4.7

Funding:

This research is part of a project (Ref. No.: APCEIU/C21/172) funded by APCEIU in response to a grant competition concerning the APTW mentorship and grant competition 2021.

This research study seeks to evaluate the (PTB) English language textbook of grade 10th to see the extent to which it has incorporated the theme of gender equality. The analysis has been done through content analysis of the textbook units and exercises. The analysis reveals that women have been underrepresented in the textbook. The female characters appear in the book only twice, whereas the male characters are not only more frequently found in the main content, but the frequency of male nouns and pronouns is also higher in the activities. The boys are found playing different games such as football, basketball, tennis, cricket, and video games, whereas females are mostly found studying, doing homework, appearing in exams, or working on a class project. Girls are found to be busy in mostly indoor activities such as studying, doing homework, painting, reading stories, or watching movies and television. Boys, on the other hand, are found doing various outdoor tasks such as gardening, going to the market, traveling, and playing outdoor games. The roles and attributes associated with the male and female characters are affected by the stereotypes in society. The research is an attempt to see how far the textbook is achieving SDG 4.7. This research can be useful for the textbook authors, and curriculum designers to consider the parameters of SDG 4.7 while planning the content.

© 2022 The Authors, Published by iRASD. This is an Open Access article under the [Creative Common Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

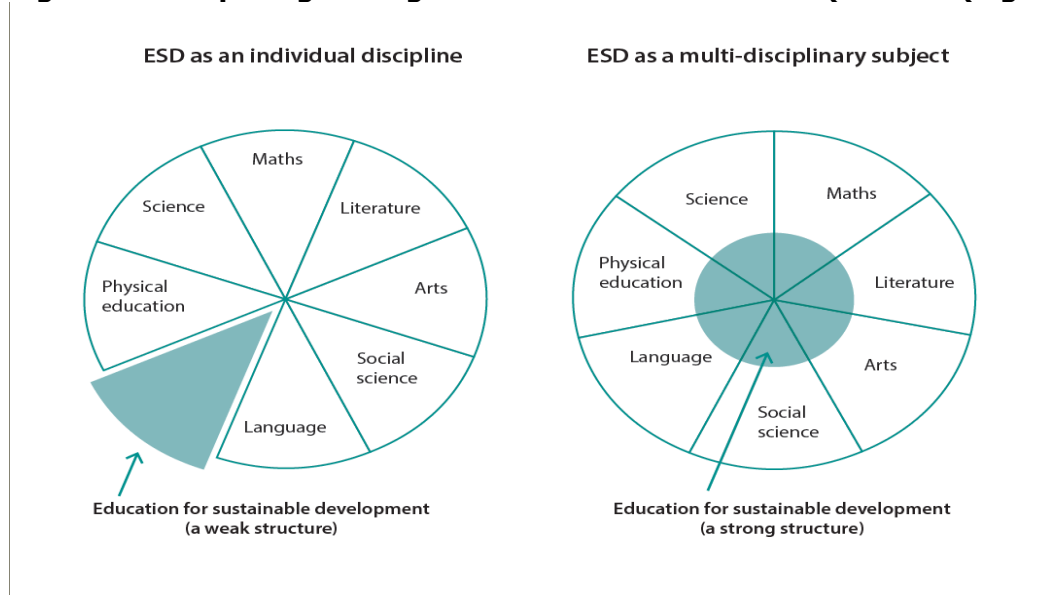
Corresponding Author's Email: ahsan.bashir@ue.edu.pk

1. Introduction

SDG 4.7 states "by 2030 ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development" United Nations (2015) An indicator of SDG 4.7 emphasizes that global citizenship education and education for sustainable development including gender equality and human rights should be inculcated in "national education policies, curricula, teacher, education, and student assessment" (UNESCO, 2016a).

We are living in a globalized world where we are facing grave environmental, economical, and social challenges. Education for sustainable development and global citizenship education needs to be mainstreamed as mentioned in the indicator of SDG 4.7. "embedding" ESD and GCED in the textbooks is one strategy for mainstreaming. ESD should be inculcated in the curricula and should not be merely added on as a separate subject. It should not focus on education about sustainable development rather the concept of sustainable development should be incorporated in all the school subjects.

Figure 1: Comparing Strong and Weak ESD Structures (source: (Mgiep, 2017))



Textbooks have always been the most important resource material both for the students and the teachers. In many countries, textbooks are not revised often, and in most cases, the textbook is the only material that the students consult on a particular subject. Georgescu, Bernard, and Peterson (2007) have rightly called the textbooks "the most visible part of the curriculum" and the "authoritative sources for the transfer of knowledge and social values". As most of the teachers in developing countries do not receive proper training and modern resources, the textbook remains the sole authentic material for them. Thus, focusing on the quality of the textbooks and incorporating sustainable development goals can play a significant role in the steady transformation of the education systems, and societies. ESD themes should be included in what "the teachers must teach" (Mgiep, 2017) A policy paper by the Global Education Monitoring Report has called on governments to review and revise the content of their textbooks urgently, in line with the core values of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It calls for these core values to be built into the national guidelines used during textbook review and taught in workshops for textbook writers and illustrators (UNESCO, 2016b).

Incorporating ESD themes into textbooks can keep students up-to-date and help them engage constructively with the real world. The themes of ESD can be efficiently and effectively inculcated in the core school subjects (such as science, mathematics, geography, and languages) as these are paid more attention and time (Mgiep, 2017).

2. English Language Textbook and Education for Sustainable Development

"But if thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought" (Orwell, 1984).

Words have the power to shape the world around us. The idea has been presented by many linguists in the theories of language such as the linguistic relativity of Sapir Whorf, and the linguistic triangle of Saussure. Words can strongly impact relations with the people in society. The post-colonial literary theory also emphasizes the role of language in the marginalization of certain national groups.

The status of English as a lingua franca and as a global language cannot be denied. In Pakistan, English is taught as a compulsory subject at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. The focus of English language textbooks and teachers has been to develop the communication skills of the students focusing on the four basic skills i.e listening, speaking, reading, and writing. English language textbooks not only include grammar, but also teach language through literature such as prose, fiction, poetry, novels, and plays. To some extent, the English textbooks play a part in promoting themes related to humanity, love, and peace. However, this can significantly increase, if language textbooks are designed carefully keeping in view the sustainable development needs. Language textbooks have an "open-space" where any topic can be fit-in to teach the skills of reading, writing, listening, or speaking. This open

space can be utilized to inculcate the themes of sustainable development and make students better aware of the ecological, economical, and social issues of the global world. Jodoin and Singer (2019) postulate the same idea that EFL textbooks can be easily conformed to promote education for sustainable development. Language skills can be enhanced by adding content related to SDGs and it can also provide learners meaningful and authentic materials for language practice.

Figure 2: Mgiep (2017) Textbooks for sustainable development: A guide to embedding



UNESCO MGIEP (2017) suggested the following ways in which textbooks can be designed to contribute to sustainable development.

2.1 Use the content in language through the 'open content space'

The textbook material (essay, stories, or poems, etc) should be selected carefully in accordance with the themes of global citizenship education, and education for sustainable development to develop a connection between the course contents and the real world.

2.2 Recognize and use language as a 'power tool' to create a peaceful, just, and ecologically sustainable world

Communication skills can be taught by using language for advocacy of sustainability, promoting peace, and addressing social justice. Mother tongues can also be incorporated in English language textbooks to respect diversity and cultural identity.

2.3 Use literature to enable learners to make informed decisions and take action as responsible global citizens

Literature that can inculcate the values, create empathy, and develop critical thinking and interpretation skills can be included.

This research aims at analyzing the English language textbook. As discussed above incorporating GCED and ESD in core subjects is important because a considerable amount of time and effort is dedicated to these subjects. English is taught as a compulsory subject at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. If ESD themes are incorporated in English language textbooks these can play a vital role in creating a better world. For this research, the textbook of 10th grade of Punjab Textbook Board (PTB) has been selected. The books by PTB are taught in all government schools of Pakistan, and in most of the private schools as well. The 10th grade is the highest standard in school. Students have to enter college after passing 10th grade. This level is critical as students become aware of the important issues in the world around them and also develop a sense of responsibility. Therefore, it's crucial to choose carefully what they study in the classrooms. The research is an attempt to evaluate the English language textbook in the light of SDG 4.7. SDG 4.7 focuses on;

- education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles,
- human rights,
- gender equality,

- promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence,
- global citizenship, and
- appreciation of cultural diversity and culture's contribution to sustainable development.

This research however has selected one theme. It seeks to analyze the textbook of English to determine the extent to which the theme of gender equality has been incorporated in the textbook content.

3. Methodology

The analysis has been done through content analysis of the textbook. For detailed analysis, the following sub-themes were finalized for the content analysis.

- Is there an equal representation of gender (both male and female) in the text?
 - What is the frequency of occurrence of the male and female references in the text?
- Are there any stereotypical roles/representations of gender in the text?
 - What social roles/activities do men and women perform in the text?
 - In what social/familial relations women have been discussed?
- Does the text encourage women empowerment?
 - Is there any content/activity in the textbook that promotes the role of women in society?

4. Findings of the Content Analysis

4.1 The Frequency of Occurrence of the Male and Female References in the Text

The frequency of male characters in the content and male references in the activities is quite prominent than the female characters and references. Women have been underrepresented in the textbook. The underrepresentation in the textbook affects young minds and contributes to the construction of social identity. This gradually robs off the underrepresented people Alice Walker has beautifully summed up the idea that how one gives up one's rights and powers in society. "The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don't have any"

The female character appears in the book only twice. First, it appears in unit#1 "Hazrat Muhammad ﷺ an Embodiment of Justice" where a woman of high rank has stolen something. This reference is however not prominent and has been used as an example to show the justice of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). The character of the woman in the example is not the focus of the incident rather it is the high rank of the lady. People wanted to save the woman from the punishment because she belonged to a rich family, but the Holy Prophet (PBUH) did not discriminate between the rich and the poor in applying the rule of law. Another woman character appears in the book in unit#11 "Great Expectations" where the character of Pip's sister has been represented as a strict and hard woman who used to scold Pip. However, this story is about an orphan child "Pip" who is the main focus of the story along with other supporting male characters. The reference to the sister is a cursory mention in the beginning paragraph to show that the child was living a hard life in the beginning.

On the other hand, the male characters are not only more frequently found in the main content, but the frequency of male nouns and pronouns is also higher in the activities. The first lesson is about the justice of Hazrat Muhammad ﷺ (Peace be Upon Him). The examples of justice have been elaborated with reference to male members of the society visiting the prophet and seeking his guidance on different matters. Also, the examples where prophet ﷺ advised his companions for justice are given there. In Unit # 4 "First" the image shows that the first aid provider and the victim both are males.

However, the whole unit discusses about providing first aid without a single mention of male or female referents. This leaves a neutral impact on the reader that the unit has been addressed to both genders without discrimination. However, the neutral tone of the unit also leaves an impact that the explicit mention of both the genders has been deliberately avoided. The image of the male patient and the first aid giver strengthens the concept of male dominance.

Figure 3



Unit 7 "Little by Little One Walks Far" is a lesson about co-curricular activities. It aims to motivate students to participate in different kinds of co-curricular activities to achieve success in the future. However, the whole narrative essay is about a boy, the image of the chapter also shows a boy walking through a road, and the comprehension questions at the end of the unit also show that the whole essay was about a male figure who strived hard to achieve a good academic record. Though the unit is a good selection to encourage students to participate in co-curricular activities along with their studies, however, it does not make any reference to any female characters throughout the lesson

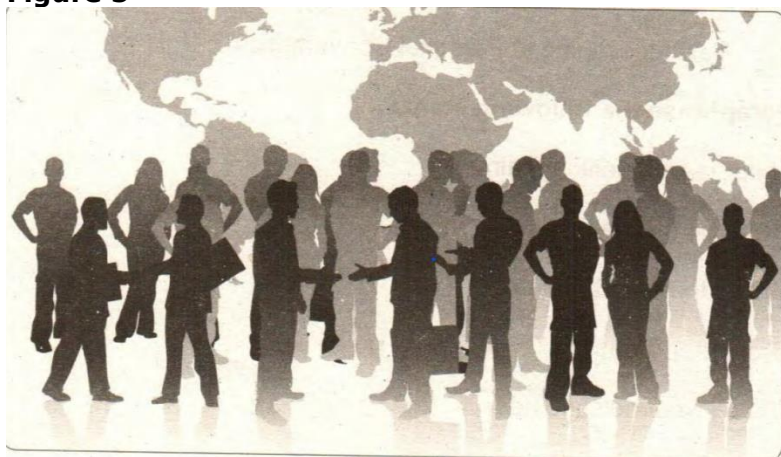
Figure 4



Unit 9 "Selecting the Right Career" is an important unit that provides students career counseling by discussing a range of options. The unit also has a glimpse of women professionals in the image. The title page of the unit shows an image of the male and females in a business setting. However, you will still find more male figures in the image than females. This unit again adopts a neutral tone without explicitly mentioning any career for boys or girls, it just mentions the fields without explicitly telling that both the boys and girls can excel in this field. The neutral tone does not strongly encourage girls to choose professions.

Unit 10 "A World without Books" aims to spark the love of reading in the students by mentioning the benefits of reading. The unit maintains its neutral tone throughout the lesson though the author could not avoid giving the example of a male author Colm Toibin and his story character Cantonese man who was engrossed in reading a novel and was experiencing sorrows and joys of the story. The reference of this Cantonese man no doubt can encourage students to take interest in reading books, however ignoring the explicit mention of girls again leaves an impact that the weaker gender has not been given any representation in the text. Moreover, the title-image also shows a book in the hands of a reader without explicitly showing a boy or girl. Though, the reference about Cantonese man gives dominance to the boys in the unit.

Figure 5



Unit 11 "Great Expectations" is a summary of the novel by Charles Dickinson which discusses the struggle of an orphan named Pip who faces injustice in the early years of his life, but later through education and his hard work he was able to make a successful career. The story highlights that ambition in life and self-improvement is important than wealth and money. The story mentions several male characters including Pip, Joe, his friend, prisoner, and insurance agent, however, the story mentions only one female character that is Pip's sister who is strict with him and is found scolding him.

4. Gender Representation in the Activities

Women were underrepresented in the main content of the units. As discussed above, the explicit mention of women was found only in two units that too is a cursory mention. Therefore, the activities in the book were also included in the analysis. At the end of each unit, an exercise is given containing different activities to teach grammar, vocabulary, reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills to the students. Each activity in the exercise section was analyzed. The activities have been analyzed in the following way:

- The frequency of male and female references occurring in the activities has been counted
- The roles of male and female references in those activities have been analyzed.
- How these roles are contributing to gender equality?

It was found out that 72 female references, whereas 136 male references occurred in the content, activities, and images. These references occur in the form of nouns or pronouns in the activities. Images reflecting female or male figures have also been counted. The references have been divided into four categories to depict the roles performed by both genders in the textbook.

4.1 The actions performed by males and females

In a few sentences, female referents were found, and they were performing limited actions as compared to male referents. The boys were found playing different games such as football, basketball, tennis, cricket, and video games, whereas females were mostly found studying, doing homework, appearing in exams, or working on a class project. Girls were found to do mostly indoor activities such as painting, reading stories, or watching movies and television. Boys, on the other hand, were found doing various outdoor tasks such as gardening, going to the market, traveling, visiting Turkey, going to the stadium, bearing a banner, applying for the job, doing a speech, and pulling out a car of a lady from the pothole.

These roles are no doubt affected by the stereotypes in society. Girls are not mentioned performing outdoor tasks, they are portrayed doing home-based tasks such as painting, watching movies, and TV. Girls have been depicted as not completely independent. In a letter-writing activity in Unit 6, a letter to the LDA chairman to report about the poor condition of the roads has been written by giving a ridiculous example of an old aged lady driving car, and getting it stuck in the potholes of a road who is later on helped by some chaps who pulled out her car. Similarly, in Unit 5, an image of a girl traveling in a taxi has been shown in an activity.

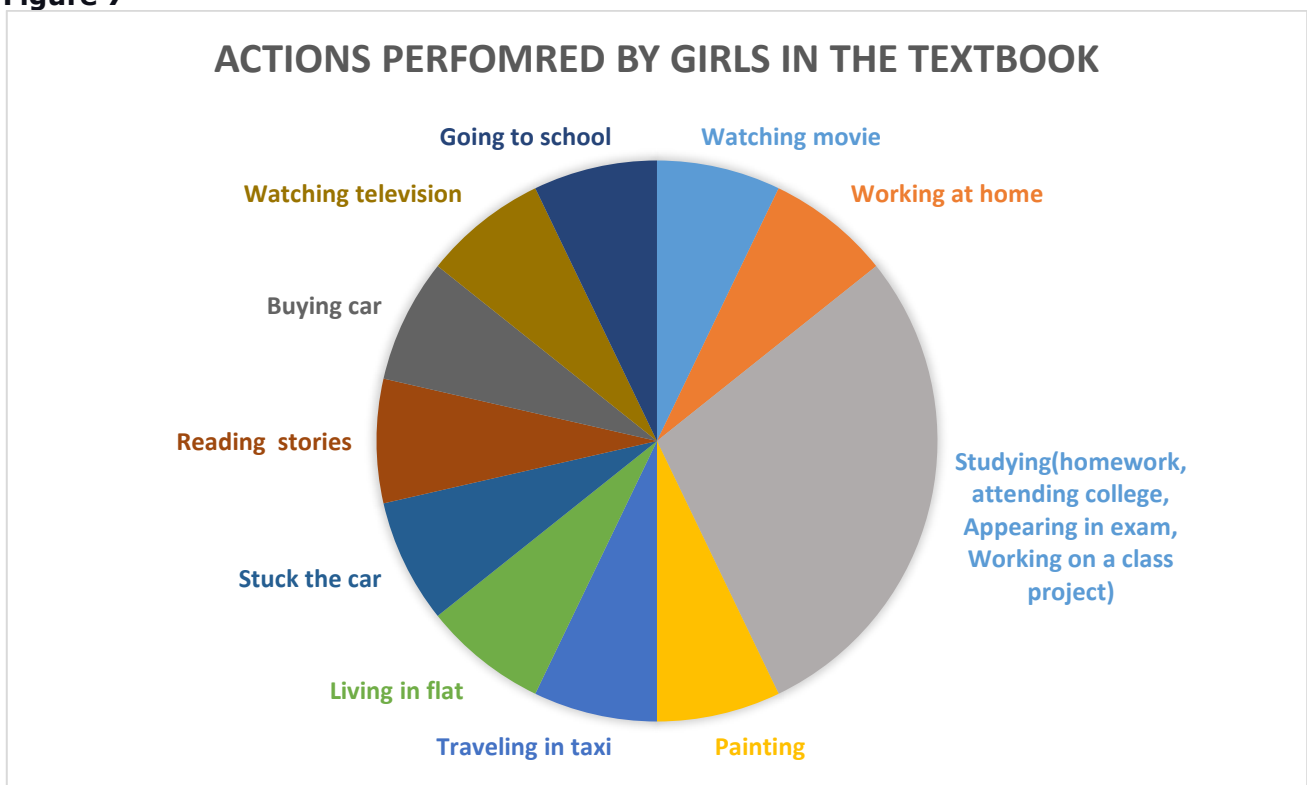
The girls in Pakistani society are still dependent on the taxi/rikshaw system to commute for their daily routine tasks.

Figure 6



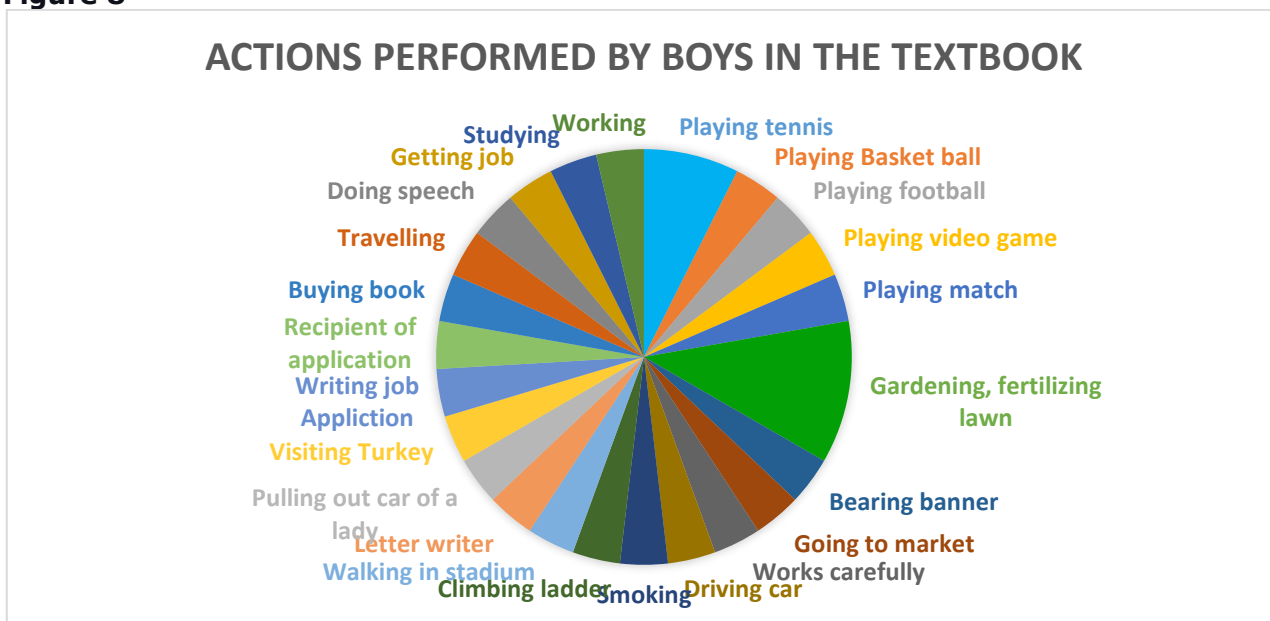
A few positive aspects have also been noticed e.g. girls have been repeatedly mentioned as either going to school, college, or studying, and doing homework. A girl has also been mentioned in a sentence as buying a car.

Figure 7



Boys have been mentioned as performing multiple tasks, they can play outdoor games such as tennis, football, basketball, cricket match, and video games. They are seen as doing gardening, traveling, and applying for the job. Though Pakistan has its teams of women players for various kinds of sports. This, however, has not been reflected in the textbook. Similarly, girls have also started taking part in various jobs and outdoor activities

Figure 8



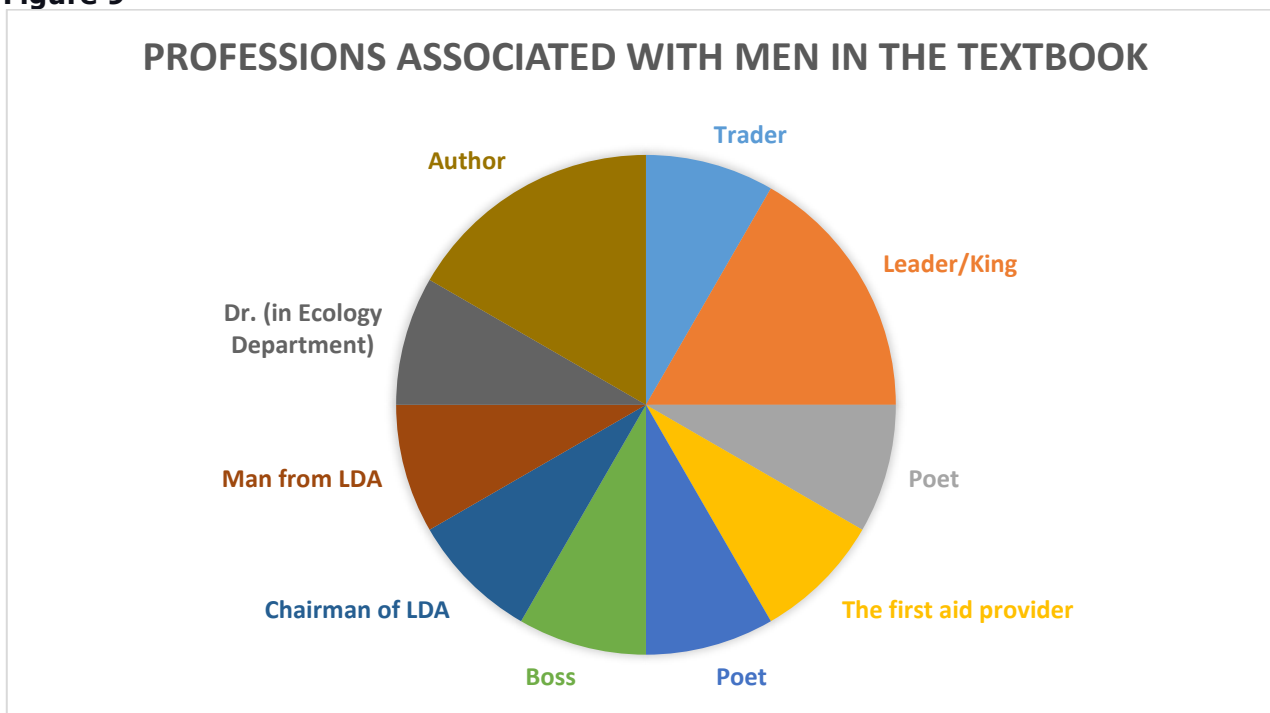
4.2 The professions adopted by males and females

The textbook contains a unit (Unit 9: Selecting the Right Career) providing career advice to teenagers. However, this unit does not specify any career for boys or girls rather it provides general advice and discussion on selecting the right degrees, certifications, or courses for a chosen field. Furthermore, most of the content in the book has been written in a neutral tone, and I could not find explicit mention of the professions in the main content of the units. Therefore, the activities have been analyzed to find out any professions associated with men or women in the textbook. Only two sentences in the whole textbook mention women involved in some kind of profession.

- My mother and her sister took vacation together (P 32, unit 3).
- Our teacher says she does not want ... (not finished) homework (page 144, unit 12).

In sentence i) the profession is not clear, however, in sentence ii), the lady is a school teacher. One poem out of three is written by a poetess;

Figure 9



On the other hand, men have been mentioned in various professions as a trader, as chairman of LDA, as workers in LDA, doctors working in the Ecology department, as boss in a company, as a leader, as a king, as a novelist, and as first aid provider (via image). Moreover, two of the poems "Try Again" and "The Rain" have been written by the poets W.E.Hickson, and W.H. Davies respectively. William Somerset Maugham has been quoted in a passage "Encouraging Reading Habit" p 126, and a complete chapter (unit:11) consists of the summary of Charles Dickens novel "Great Expectations". This shows that male references have been more frequently quoted throughout the text

4.3 The attributes associated with males and females

Some stereotypical attributes have been associated with the men in the activities. The main content has been written carefully, and explicit mention of the gender-specific roles is not found in the content. However, the activities which aim to teach grammar, and vocabulary have mentioned men and women in certain stereotypical qualities. To teach similes and metaphors, boys have been attributed the stereotypical qualities of being fast like a horse, brave like a lion, strong like an ox, and tall like a giant. Apart from these, anger has been shown as a male attribute and at three different places, boys have been shown extremely angry. Interestingly, boys have also been portrayed as lazy (couch potato), the ones who cannot do dishes, and the ones who delay the cleaning of the room. On the other hand, the girl has been attributed as "the most caring person" and someone who works at home. In unit 6, in the letter-writing activity, an aged woman has been referred to as "the poor old thing" who was really upset, because her car was stuck in the pothole. She is sympathized and rescued by the young boys.

Table 1

Attributes Associated with Men	Attributes Associated with Women
1. He is as fast as a horse p 29	1. She is without doubt the most caring person I have met, P 46 unit 4
2. The leader thought he could fly p 30	2. She worked hurriedly at home yesterday, P 46 unit 4
3. Danish threw such a temper outburst...p 30	3. The poor old thing was really upset (P 76, unit 6)
4. Mohsin was as explosive as a volcano p 30	
5. Pasha always puts off cleaning his room (P 47 , unit 4)	
6. He was lion in the battle	
7. Junaid is an Ox	
8. Waleed is a real couch potato	
9. Shahid is a volcano after hearing his brother borrowed his car without permission	
10. Faraz is a giant in his class, towering a foot over his classmates (P 60 , unit 5)	
11. The dishes ... by my brother (not/to wash), (P 73, unit 6)	
12. Waheed ... (does not obey) his parents, (P 143, unit 12)	

4.4 Social/Familial Roles

The familial roles of men and women have not been given attention in the main content of the book. However, Unit 11 "Great Expectations" makes a cursory reference towards a strict and hard elder sister looking after her orphan brother. No other unit makes special reference towards any familial relation to highlight their place or importance in society. However, the activities contain sentences that mention various family relations such as mother, father, sister, brother, son, and daughter.

Table 2

Men’s Familial Roles	Women’s Familial Roles
Father	mother Mother’s sister (aunt) mother in law
Son Brother brother in law Husband	Daughter Sister married woman

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The content analysis revealed that women are underrepresented in the text. The majority of the references are male. The content (the stories, essays, or poems) do not explicitly discuss the role of women in the home, or outside. There is a minor reference to two women characters in the book, once in unit number one, and second in unit number eleven. These two references are also cursorily mentioned. The findings echo the results of decade-old research studies on Punjab Textbooks by McDonald (2013)), and Nayyar and Salim (2003). McDonald (2013) conducted a critical discourse analysis of 23 textbooks from classes 1 through 10 including the textbooks of English, Islamiat, Social Studies, and Home Economics. She found out that not only gender-biased language was used with more male-specific nouns and pronouns, but also the women were underrepresented in the texts, they were mostly shown within the private spheres, in the role of mothers, daughters, and sisters. Mattu and Hussain (2004) conducted a semiotic analysis of the language and images of the English textbooks of grade 7-10 and found out that the women are not only absent from sports, history, but also from four walls of the house but also they are continuously assigned subordinate and meager roles. A recent study on Urdu and Social Studies textbooks from grade 9th-12th by Munir and Noreen (2020) shows that the situation has yet not changed. They report that in these textbooks gender inequality is highly evident, they highlight that motherhood and wifehood are the glorified and exalted roles of women represented in these textbooks, the rapidly changing world where more women are entering every kind of field today has been ignored by the policymakers, the book authors, and the editors who are still finding it difficult to liberate themselves from the patriarchal myths. They emphasize that women need to be portrayed in decisive, productive, and leadership roles.

6. Neutral Tone

Unlike the previous textbook-based studies, the content analysis in this research found out that the textbook author has made an effort to select the gender-neutral language in the main content of the book which includes the stories, and the essays mostly. It appears as if the textbook writer has intentionally and carefully avoided the use of any kind of male or female pronouns in the main text and has also avoided any examples which may require explicit reference to gender roles (see unit 2, unit 4, unit 6, unit 7, unit 9, and unit 10 of the textbook under discussion). This gives a neutral tone to the content, the student reader may not feel that it has been written in a gender-biased way. However, avoiding gender-based language is not helping to create an impression of women empowerment in the text. The activities/the exercises given at the end of each unit are clearly showing male dominance with more frequent male references appearing in them (see content analysis above). These activities portray women performing stereotypical roles and doing pointless activities such as watching television, painting, or watching films, etc. the textbook reflects an unsuccessful attempt to use gender-fair language. Gender fair language uses neutralization and feminization to treat men and women equally. Neutralization means to replace the masculine forms with a more neutral form such as replacing policeman with police officer, while feminization means to make female references more visible such as instead of using “the applicant” he or she may be used (Sczesny, Formanowicz, & Moser, 2016). The textbook has only tried to adopt neutralization at a few places and has ignored feminization altogether. Also, it is pertinent to highlight that this approach has been only used in the content, the activities continue to reflect gender-biasedness and stereotypical roles.

7. Recommendations

There should be equal representation of men and women in the content and activities of the textbook. The social and familial role of women in sports, politics, science, and other domains of life should be represented equally. Examples of contemporary famous men and

women leaders should also be included. Gender-fair-language should be used by not only utilizing the technique of neutralization but also the technique of feminization.

Language as a tool should be used to promote respect towards the opposite gender, and to promote equity. The practice activities in the exercise section should be carefully designed to focus not only on grammar, but also to teach values required for the sustainable development of society.

References

- Georgescu, D., Bernard, J., & Peterson, C. (2007). *Thinking and Building Peace Through Innovative Textbook Design: Report of the Inter-regional Experts' Meeting on Developing Guidelines for Promoting Peace and Intercultural Understanding Through Curricula, Textbooks and Learning Materials*. Paris: UNESCO, Education Sector.
- Jodoin, J. J., & Singer, J. (2019). A framework for integrating education for sustainable development in the English as a foreign language classroom in Japan: an appeal to the language teaching community. *Osaka JALT Journal*, 6(1), 51-66.
- Mattu, A., & Hussain, N. (2004). Class and gender in school texts. *The subtle subversion: The state of curricula and textbooks in Pakistan*, 91-100.
- McDonald, S. (2013). Boys play cricket, girls play house: examining the gender binary in Pakistani public schools. In. Islamabad, Pakistan: Sustainable Development Policy Institute.
- Mgiep, U. (2017). Textbooks for sustainable development: A guide to embedding. *Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development: New Delhi, India*.
- Munir, A., & Noreen, S. (2020). Global Citizenship Education and Gender Depiction in Textbooks: The Case of Punjab Textbook Board's Pakistan Studies and Urdu Textbooks. *Research Journal of Social Sciences and Economics Review*, 1(3), 72-79. doi:[https://doi.org/10.36902/rjsser-vol1-iss3-2020\(72-79\)](https://doi.org/10.36902/rjsser-vol1-iss3-2020(72-79))
- Nayyar, A. H., & Salim, A. (2003). The subtle subversion. In (Vol. 2). Islamabad, Pakistan: Sustainable Development Policy Institute
- Orwell, G. (1984). 1949. In (pp. 1-181): Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Sczesny, S., Formanowicz, M., & Moser, F. (2016). Can gender-fair language reduce gender stereotyping and discrimination? *Frontiers in psychology*, 7, 25. doi:<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.00025>
- UNESCO. (2015). Global citizenship education, topics and learning objectives. In. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNESCO. (2016a). Education 2030: Incheon declaration and framework for action: towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all. In. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNESCO. (2016b). *Textbooks pave the way to sustainable development. Global education monitoring report policy paper 28*.